

August 2023

Federal Employee Program Use of Imaging Studies for Low Back Pain (LBP)

Florida Blue members (ages 18 to 75 years old) insured under the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Federal Employee Program® (FEP) will be receiving an email this month on issues related to low back pain. Members will receive information on common myths, what to do when experiencing back pain, and when medical treatment should be sought from a provider.

According to the National Committee for Quality Assurance website, evidence shows unnecessary or routine imaging (X-ray, MRI, CT scans) for low back pain is not associated with improved outcomes. It also exposes patients to unnecessary harms such as radiation and further unnecessary treatment. For most individuals who experience severe low back pain, pain improves within the first two weeks of onset. Avoiding imaging for patients when there is no indication of an underlying condition can prevent unnecessary harm and unintended consequences to patients and can reduce health care costs.

How can you help:

- Unless medically necessary, avoid ordering imaging studies (X-rays, CT, MRI) in the first 28 days of uncomplicated low back pain diagnosis.
- Encourage patients to try conservative measures first:



Exercise and stretching | Ice & Heat



Taking recommended amount of over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medicine



Physical therapy or a visit to a chiropractor

- Educate patients that imaging tests (X-rays, CT scans and MRIs) do not result in faster recoveries and can lead to unnecessary treatments, surgery, and additional out-of-pocket costs.
- **If imaging is necessary for the patient, be sure to document reasoning for imaging in medical record and use appropriate exclusion codes (Cancer, recent trauma, neurologic impairment, and spinal infections) where necessary.**
- There are several categories/reasons that will remove a patient from the LBP HEDIS measure if imaging is done within 28 days of the diagnosis because there is a medical need. Some of the ICD-10 exclusion examples include:
 - **G89.11** – Document this code on the claim when members have history of acute trauma or injury within the last 90 days.

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- **R26.2** – Document this code on the claim when a member complains of difficulty with walking due to low back pain.
- **Z86.03** – Document this code on the claim when a member has a personal history of cancer, or uncertain behavior if you have concerns for metastasis or complications due to that history.

By working together, we can improve health outcomes for your patients, our members. If your patients have questions about benefits or claims, they may contact our Customer Service team at 1-800-333-2227 (TTY users, call 711). We are available Monday-Thursday from 8 a.m. - 6 p.m. and Friday from 9 a.m. to noon, ET. Members may also visit [FEPblue.org](https://www.fepblue.org) for more information.

For more HEDIS information, visit [FloridaBlue.com](https://www.floridablue.com), select **For Providers, Tools & Resources**, then **Quality Programs: HEDIS & PQA Measures**.

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